

April 11, 1983

LB 158

PRESIDENT: Senator Barrett.

SENATOR BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. President, and members, I have offered the amendments to LB 158 in the spirit of compromise. There have been some concerns lately which admittedly I share that LB 158 as introduced represents too sharp an increase in the workmen's compensation benefits for a one week period. As introduced by Senator Wiitala, LB 158 would increase the maximum weekly benefits from \$180 to \$215 as described by Senator Wiitala, which represent about a 19.4 percent increase. Now amendments would limit the increase from...on the maximum from \$180 per week to \$200 per week, which is still over 11 percent increase. The amendments would maintain the current minimum benefit level at \$49 as opposed to the figure called for in LB 158 which is \$84. This means that if an employee receives less than \$49 per week and is injured in a work related accident, his weekly benefit amounts would equal his wages. I recognize as Senator Wiitala has pointed out so well that maximum benefits for workmen's compensation related accidents have not been increased since 1979, but I also recognize that the economic outlook for business in Nebraska has not been the brightest lately, making this a very poor time to additionally burden employers with excessive workmen's compensation costs. I offer these amendments with these factors in mind. These amendments are intended to strike a fair balance between the needs of employers who are injured in work related accidents and the financial realities which are today confronting our employers in Nebraska. I think it is a fair amendment. It is equitable. I would urge the body to support the amendment. Thank you, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes Senator Hefner.

SENATOR HEFNER: Mr. President and members of the body, I rise to support the Barrett amendment. I think it is a fair one. I think it is a compromise. I think it is a compromise that industry and business and other employers can live with. I think we all realize that workmen's comp should be increased a little, but the first proposal or the original bill was nearly a 20 percent increase and certainly it is over a four-year period probably but it costs business or employers a lot of extra bucks in the first year and I think that this is a very drastic increase. As the amendment is proposed, it is approximately an 11 percent increase and I think that the employers can live with this. I want to call out to you that we are in difficult economic times. There are some businesses that